THE IMPACT OF SOCIAL MEDIA ON THE NATURE OF CONFLICT, AND A COMMANDER'S STRATEGY FOR SOCIAL MEDIA

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Social media is a phenomenon that has changed the way information is passed across societies and around the world. The rapid spread of blogs, social networking sites, media sharing technology and wikis, aided by the rapid spread of mobile technology, is changing the nature of social and political discourse and therefore is changing the conditions in which the US Military operates. The speed with which information can be shared using social media has increased dramatically. The traditional roles of the media have changed with the ubiquitous nature of the new media. Finally, social media allows people to use social networking to mobilize groups in support of a cause without having to expose themselves to the risks and costs formerly associated with activism. This paper looks at case studies of recent events, examples of effective application of social media, and current U.S. operational doctrine and will attempt to answer the question: What are the potential implications of social media on the strategic environment and the nature of conflicts? More importantly, the final section of this paper addresses the question: How can US military commanders develop a strategy for social media to be successful operating in the social media environment?

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ABSTRACT

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The Impact of Social Media on the Nature of Conflict, and a Commander's Strategy for Social Media

Introduction

Social media, sometimes referred to as "new media" is the latest phenomenon in the information world. Social media such as blogs, media-sharing sites and social networking sites, use the internet to transform broadcast media monologues (one to many) into social media dialogues (many to many). Social media supports globalization and the democratization of knowledge and information, transforming people around the world from content consumers into content producers.[1] It allows a level of collaboration and instantaneous communications never before seen. The explosive proliferation of mobile web technology and cellular networks in the developing world are allowing the social media phenomenon to reach citizenry who have historically been left out of the worldwide social discourse. Emerging social media tools, like Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, Flikr, and a myriad of local language-specific clones are altering the way information is passed across and between societies. Around the world, social media is becoming a commonplace tool for political and social activism. The nature of social and political discourse, and potentially the nature of armed conflict are changing.

The potential exists, if the US military fails to fully understand these social networking tools, they may miss the significant impact of the social media on the nature of future conflicts. This paper will look at case studies of recent events, examples of effective application of social media, and current U.S. operational doctrine and will attempt to answer the question: What are the potential implications of social media on the strategic environment and the nature of conflicts? More importantly, the final section of this paper will address the question: How can US military commanders

develop a strategy for social media to be successful operating in the social media environment?

Section 1. What has changed in the world? (What's the big deal?)

Neda Agha-Soltan was sitting in her Peugeot 206 in traffic on Kargar Avenue. She was accompanied by her music teacher and close friend, Hamid Panahi, and two others. The four were on their way to participate in the protests against the outcome of the 2009 Iranian presidential election. The car's air conditioner was not working well, so she stopped her car some distance from the main protests and got out on foot to escape the heat. She was standing and observing the sporadic protests in the area when she was shot in the chest, (reportedly by a member of the Basij, the pro-government Iranian militia).   As captured on amateur video, she collapsed to the ground and was tended to by a doctor and others from the crowd. Someone in the crowd around her shouted, "She has been shot! Someone, come and take her!" The videos spread across the internet virally, quickly gaining the attention of international media and viewers. Discussions about the incident on Twitter, a popular micro-blogging site, became one of the most viewed topics worldwide by the end of the day on June 20, 2009. [2]

What happened next reveals the potential power of social media. Within hours, several versions of the video were posted on YouTube and linked to various other websites. Millions saw the gruesome photos of Neda's death when they were posted on blogs, websites, Facebook pages and internet news sites. The images of Neda's death highlighted the harsh response from the Iranian government, and added fuel to the next ten days of violent protests in Tehran. Many people around the world began

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posting editorials about the protests and the Iranian government's oppressive reactions. Twitter reported millions of "Tweets", or 140 character long comments, most condemning the Iranian government and its supporters. Iranian students began using Twitter and Facebook, as well as Flickr, the social site that allows users to post and share photos, to communicate to the Iranian audience information about when and where the next protest would take place, and which streets to avoid because of police or militia checkpoints.[3]

The case of Neda demonstrates that social media is not easily contained. Even with all the measures taken by the Iranian government, the images of the protests and the reports of the government's abuses continued to somehow make it to the web. The protestors quickly devised ways to get around the government efforts to impose blocks on their networking. The Iranian government eventually managed to control much of the online traffic, but it was too late to stop the effects of the social media. The Iranian government received massive diplomatic pressure from governments and condemnation from media around the world to put an end to the post-election violence.

What is Social Media? For most Americans under the age of thirty, this question is a little ridiculous (If you don't believe it, ask a teenager). These "digital natives" have always had access to the internet. They don't use phone books; they seldom get their news from printed newspapers; and even e-mail is becoming an antiquated form of communication. Social media applications appear to them as simply a natural evolution of the internet from an information-collecting tool, to an information-sharing and collaboration tool. The internet has, since its beginning been where one goes to retrieve information and to conduct transactions, like making a purchase. The

applications now exploding on the internet are designed to allow people to not only get information, but to share information and collaborate at a level never seen before. Through a variety of software applications, average internet users now have the ability to post information themselves almost instantly, without having to know how to build a website or to write in computer language. Commenter Clay Shirky, argued recently in *Here Comes Everybody*, that social media has reduced the institutional obstacles to collective action such as to make accelerated cooperation, collaboration much easier, and therefore, more possible. It is effectively creating new characteristics (collaboration), in an old institution (the internet).[4]

There are countless examples of social media tools available to the casual internet user. There are tools that are used for communication, for social networking, for professional networking, for sharing videos, and photos, and music. There are sites dedicated to collaborating on projects, for games and entertainment, and for sharing opinions. There seems no limit to the types and number of social media applications.

Blogs are a very basic form of social media. blogs, or a truncation of the term "web-logs" are simply an internet site where the writer can record commentary, opinion, news accounts or anything they choose. There are millions of blogs on the internet, most are read only by a few dedicated readers, but a few are universally popular. Micro-blogging sites, such as Twitter are recently popular developments in the internet world. Twitter allows users to post short messages, or "tweets" on a site from their computer or mobile phone. Twitter then allows users to search, categorize, and decide which tweets they want to see. Users can habitually follow the tweets of a particular user or group of users, or they can search for tweets of a specific category. Users can

furthermore decide whether to receive selected tweets on their mobile phones via text message or on their computer. Tweets can have embedded links to websites or photos, further adding to their utility.

Social networking sites have become very popular recently. There are thousands of social networking sites, in many languages around the world. One of the most popular is Facebook with over 300 Million users worldwide.[5] Sites like Facebook allow users to establish an online community with which to maintain contact and exchange social information. Users of most of these social networking sites can search and tailor their network to people with common interests and backgrounds. Facebook allows users to follow social and political causes in which they have an interest.

YouTube and Flickr are examples of social media sites designed to allow users to share multimedia such as pictures, videos, and music with a broad audience. Users can search and browse millions of videos, pictures, and audio files. Users can then make comments, save copies of files, forward or attach the files to other media, and there seems to be no end to the things that can be done with the multimedia files.

Wikis are websites that allow easy collaboration for the specific purpose of creating a project. They allow multiple users to add, delete and modify content on a website. Wikipedia, the online collaborative encyclopedia, is the most recognizable example of a wiki. Wikis are used in the academic and business world such as software development to create collaborative websites, to power community websites, for personal note taking, in corporate intranets, and in knowledge management systems.[6]

Social media is hardly an American phenomenon. Social media sites are available in local languages every region of the world. China has a plethora of Chinese-

language clones of the social media sites. The Chinese social networking site, *Q-zone* has over 300 million users, and the Chinese-language clone of Twitter has experienced tremendous growth. In Russia, the social networking site, *Vkontakte* has more users than Facebook.

Even in the developing world, social media has a significant and growing presence. In the Middle-East, Eastern Europe, south Asia and even Africa, social media use is growing rapidly. For example, 9 million Turkish language users signed up for Facebook last year. Facebook is working in five Indian languages including Tamil, Hindi, and Punjabi. Since offering an Italian language version about a year ago, the number of users in Italy grew from 350,000 to 8 million. Facebook alone is now available in 43 languages and is being translated into 60 more.[7] Social media clearly has a global appeal.

Is Social Media just a fad? Or, perhaps is it the biggest shift since the industrial revolution? *Socialnomics – The Social Media blog* has compiled facts to illustrate the shocking growth of social media in the last few years. Consider the following: [8]

- 96 % of people in Generation-Y have joined a social network.

- Social media has overtaken pornography as the #1 activity on the web.

- Consider the time it took for previous media forms to reach 50 million users:

    o Radio: 38 years

    o TV: 13 years

    o internet: 4 years

    o Ipod: 3 years

    o Facebook added 100 million users in 9 months

- o I phone social media applications hit 1 billion users in 9 months

- If Facebook were a country, it would be the 4th largest in the world, behind China, India, and the United States. Yet, China's Q-zone (Chinese language social networking site) is larger than Facebook.

- 80% of Twitter usage is on mobile devices.

- Gen Y&Z consider e-mail to be passé; some US universities have already stopped distributing e-mail addresses to incoming freshmen.

- YouTube is the second largest search engine in the world, they hold over 100 million videos.

- Wikipedia has over 13 million articles; Studies show it is more accurate than the Encyclopedia Britannica[9]; 78% of the articles are non-English.

- There are over 200 million blogs on the internet, 54% of the bloggers post daily.

- Hulu (online TV) has grown from 63 million streams in April 2008 to 373 million in April 2009.

- 70% of 18-34 Year olds have watched TV on the web. In the past month, 25% of Americans have watched a short video on their cell phones.

- 24 of the 25 largest newspapers in the US are experiencing record decline in circulation.

These facts illustrate the incredible growth of social media across not only the United States, but the world. But we still must ask the question, is social media just a fad? And, when the hype dies down will social media remain as simply a novel application on the internet? In the late 1950s and early 1960s, the Hula Hoop

experienced extreme growth, but a few years later, the hype died down and the demand for Hula Hoops decreased accordingly. What makes social media different from the Hula Hoop? Most experts in the field believe social media is here to stay.   They say it represents a fundamental change in the way societies communicate. When societies change the way they communicate, they change society. [10] Some analysts compare the importance of social media "revolution" to the advent of the printing press or to the Industrial Revolution. It's too early to tell if the impact of social media will be as great as the printing press or the Industrial Revolution, but it is safe to assume that the capabilities represented by social media will continue to grow in popularity and will have a significant impact on social discourse.

Another phenomenon adding velocity to the social media revolution is the tremendous increase in mobile phone capability and availability. Web-enabled mobile technology allows users of social media to do so without the requirement for a fixed computer connection on a desktop or laptop computer. In some parts of the world, users of social media are "leapfrogging the laptop". In places where internet penetration has been low or nonexistent because the relatively high cost of owning a computer with an internet connection was more than ordinary citizens could afford, people are now using more affordable mobile phones where the 3rd-Generation (3G) network is now widely available. One example is in Botswana where the estimated internet penetration is 4-6%. Even with a very low level of internet connections, Facebook is now beginning to establish a significant presence.[11] It is fair to assume that the rapid spread of mobile technology to the developing world will continue to enable and promote the use of social media in places never seen before.

In a recent speech, Secretary of State Hillary Clinton highlighted several examples of the proliferation of mobile technology in developing countries. Over the last year, farmers in Kenya, have seen their income grow by as much as 30 % since they started using mobile banking technology; in Bangladesh, more than 300,000 people have signed up to learn English on their mobile phones; and in Sub-Saharan Africa, women entrepreneurs use the internet to get access to microcredit loans and connect themselves to global markets.[12] The impact of the proliferation of mobile social media in the developing world is arguably narrowing the gap between the internet haves and have-nots. In a recent book, an African advocate noted that unlike in the west, where there is already an existing network of communication through landlines, mobile phones in Africa provide communication where there was none previously. She goes on to note that it is estimated that there are nearly 300 million mobile phone users in Africa today, and the number is growing rapidly.[13] While the specific changes are hard to predict, they will clearly have an important effect on the social and political systems in the developing parts of the world.

Section 2. How is Social Media Affecting societies and the nature of social discourse and conflict?

It is clear that social media is growing rapidly and at a minimum, the characteristics of it are here to stay. The question to answer is: What is really different and why should the US military care? Many experts believe that social media is fundamentally changing social habits and practices. "The invention of a tool doesn't create change; it has to have been around long enough that most of society is using it. It's when a technology becomes normal, then ubiquitous, and finally so pervasive as to be invisible, that the really profound change happens, and for young people today, our

new social tools have passed normal, and are heading to ubiquitous, and invisible is coming".[14] If that is true, then in order to stay ahead of the trends, the US Military needs to quickly understand the possible implications for the nature of conflicts. There will certainly be countless changes to the social discourse resulting from social media.

Several trends are emerging as a result of the proliferation of social media enabled by mobile web technology. First, there is a dramatic increase in the speed and transparency with which information is passed. The time for information to reach a worldwide audience has gone in recent years from days to hours to minutes to seconds, and most governments or institutions can do little effectively to stop or slow it. Second, the social media enable individuals or groups to impact or even shape a social dialog, bypassing the traditional media. Essentially, there is no longer an interlocutor or gatekeeper on the presentation of news. Almost anyone with a web enabled phone or laptop can disseminate seemingly credible information almost instantly. Third, the social media has reduced the time, effort and financial "costs" of organizing. This effectively allows people to quickly coalesce around and even collaborate for a common cause, without the requirement for a formal organization.[15] There are several recent examples where social media tools were vital for the opposition leaders' ability to mobilize physical support for their cause. The following example from Moldova in April 2009 illustrates these points.

On April 7, 2009, in the former Soviet state of Moldova, following a disputed election where the government claimed victory for the Communist party, organizers from two youth movements, "Hyde Park" and "ThinkMoldova" began calling for people to gather at an event billed as "I am a not a Communist." Natalia Morar, one of the

leaders of "ThinkMoldova", described the effort on her blog as "six people, 10 minutes for brainstorming and decision-making, several hours of disseminating information through networks, Facebook, blogs, SMSs and e-mails."[16] The next morning a crowd of more than 10,000 young Moldovans materialized seemingly out of nowhere. After initially peaceful protests, they began ransacking government buildings and clashing with the police. Observers of this event dubbed it the "Twitter Revolution". The organizers used social media to get the word out about the protests. They quickly created a group on Twitter, #pman (short for Piaţa Marii Adunări Naţionale, the Romanian name for the capital city's biggest square) to allow people to search and more easily keep track of the events as they were developing. Prior to April 7, 2009 there were very few Twitter accounts in Moldova, some estimate less than 100. One of the organizers of the protests reported adding over 200 new followers on the day of the protests, most of whom he believed to be Moldovan. He added that he believed most of them created the accounts that day because of the use of Twitter in the protests.[17] Reports of the events streamed out of Chisnau faster than the traditional media could report it. Amateur videos were posted on YouTube and photos were posted on Flickr. Blogs and social media sites contained countless reports and discussion forums about what was going on in Chisinau. It is a likely that many of the Twitter discussions were simply interested foreigners and the Moldovan Diaspora, since some tweets and posts were in English, but many of the discussions were in Romanian indicating that much of the discussion was originating in Moldova. The European and Russian media scrambled to catch up with the social media sites, but most of them were only able to report after the fact. There is considerable argument about the degree to which Twitter

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was a major factor in the protests. Some observers say that many of the tweets that came from outside Moldova had little to do with the actual protests. It is indisputable, however that social media played some role in the protests and in the shaping of the world media coverage of the events.

Speed and Transparency. The first major change to the environment to consider is the speed and transparency with which information can be passed in a social media environment to a very broad audience. Speed and transparency are intertwined concepts relating to social media. Sheer speed of communications systems can be rendered useless if governments and institutions can effectively filter or stop the information flow. Social media is demonstrating potential change in both the speed and transparency of information flow. The following example is illustrative of both the speed and transparency of information enabled by social media. In May 2008, an earthquake hit a remote region in Sichuan Province of China. The earthquake had devastating effects. Nearly 70,000 dead, thousands others injured and missing, and nearly 5 million people were homeless. Within minutes, messages, pictures and videos taken from cell phone cameras were being posted by ordinary citizens on QQ or Q-zone, (China's largest social network) and on Twitter. The earthquake was being discussed on social networks before any news site began reporting it. Some news organizations in fact reported their initial indications of the quake came from the social media. The Wikipedia page for the earthquake was created within forty minutes, and within hours web pages to assist the search for missing relatives were created.[18] The speed with which this information reached the world is staggeringly quick.   By contrast, in 1976 when a similar earthquake hit China, it took several months for the government to even

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acknowledge there was an earthquake. The Communist government suppressed the information about the 1976 quake deliberately. The social media applications available today made it impossible for the Chinese government to keep the story of the 2008 earthquake quiet.   This example illustrates both points. First the flow of information is extremely fast, and second the ability of governments to suppress the flow of information is much more difficult than in the past, if not entirely impossible.

The sheer speed of information flow is a key factor in its ability to influence actions and perceptions. The social media, and social networks in particular possess a multiplying effect that enables information to spread in a viral nature, further increasing the effective speed of the information getting worldwide visibility. The earthquake in Haiti in January 12, 2010 provides another, and more recent example of the increasing speed enabled by social media. Following the massive 7.0 magnitude earthquake, land line based communications were disabled. Social media, connected by cell phone or satellite broadband communications were the only means of communications in the immediate minutes, hours and days following the earthquake.   Within minutes after the quake struck at 4:53 p.m. local time, witnesses were posting the first images on Twitpic (a photo-sharing application on Twitter), Facebook, and Flickr. In one YouTube video, the camerawoman pans a valley filled with dust still rising from the force of the earthquake. By noon the next day, YouTube had more than 450 earthquake videos.[19] Almost immediately thousands of messages were sent via Facebook and other social media. Families were searching for relatives and friends. People were reporting the images of the destruction, reporting the location of people needing rescue, and pleading for help. Non-profit and Missionary organizations with staff working in Haiti used

Facebook to check on their workers to make sure they were alive and to begin making plans for sending further relief. When the quake struck travel to the island was difficult if not impossible for many journalists. Much of the news reporting of the event came directly from social media. Clearly social media's ability to bypass the former obstacles to information flow and to take advantage of the networks' multiplying effect allowed the speed of information to increase dramatically.

Many barriers to the speed of information have been cast off with the advent of social media. The reason lies not only in the speed of the processors and internet connections, but in the multiplying effect of the social connections inherent in the social media. People have the ability to send information to everyone with whom they are connected and each of those recipients can then share the information with whom they are connected, and so on. The result is potential for the viral nature of the spread of information. To examine this phenomenon, recently the Defense Advanced Research Projects Agency (DARPA) conducted an experiment to see how long it takes to solve a problem of national scope using social media. DARPA placed ten red weather balloons in public places across the United States. The contest involved over 4,000 teams competing with one another, using social media.   The first team to locate all ten balloons would get the cash prize of $40,000. By collaborating with friends and colleagues in their social network connections and the using social tools available, the winning team of students located all ten balloons spread across the country in eight hours fifty-six minutes.[20] The networking effect of the social media enabled the team to enlist the support of many collaborators to quickly solve their dilemma.

Transparency of information flow in the social media context may be characterized by a government or institution's willingness to allow unfettered flow of information on the internet in general and social media specifically. In many countries where the government lacks the technical control of the internet, transparency may unintended and more accurately defined as an inability of governments or institution's to hide, filter or mask events and information to and from the outside world. Either way, the issue of information transparency is very complicated. The degree to which information is transparent depends on many factors. With the explosion of the internet beginning in the early 1990s, nation states took differing approaches. Open and democratic societies allowed relatively free use of the internet, establishing some minimal controls for commerce and to prevent criminal behavior. Others like China and Iran allowed and sometimes even promoted internet access, but established firewalls and filters to attempt to control the information that made it into and out of their societies. Others still like Burma and Cuba took a much more cautious approach, limiting and sometimes banning access to the internet. From the beginning there has been a constant and growing tension in these closed societies between internet users and the government to allow more access for commercial and personal use weighed against the governments' need to control information.

Despite the challenges in controlling the internet and social media, a number of countries have very strict controls on people engaging in free discussion online. The Committee to Protect Journalists (CPJ) published a special report on the *Ten Worst Countries to be a Blogger*. The ratings were based on internet access, censorship, and persecution of persons posting information to blogs. Burma was at the top of the list.

The report cited tight control of access to the internet, with less than one percent of the private citizens allowed to have access. They also report heavy censorship of material and harsh penalties, including long jail terms for violators posting unapproved information on blogs. Iran is second on the list with heavy censorship and harsh penalties including the threat of death for posting certain types of information. The list is rounded out with Syria, Cuba, Saudi Arabia, Vietnam, Tunisia, China, Turkmenistan, and Egypt.[21]

Some authoritarian nations that guard very jealously the flow of information both into and out of their closed societies are finding that it is becoming increasingly problematic. Since the disputed presidential elections in June 2009, the authorities in Iran have slowed internet speeds and shut down opposition websites. The government in Iran controls the Internet Service Providers (ISPs), and they have put in place filters that control access to websites the authorities deem as inappropriate. If an Iranian internet user attempts to access an unauthorized internet site, they are blocked and they see a screen explaining that the website they are attempting to view is banned. The government of Iran also boasts of their ability to track down users who are circumventing the controls and viewing unauthorized websites, even those using the standard tactic of using proxy servers, (servers outside the geographic region) for access. Even with these controls in place, determined users are devising ways to circumvent the controls. Journalists inside Iran have been banned from attending opposition demonstrations, but that has not kept footage of anti-government gatherings from reaching the internet.[22] Young, tech savvy users inside Iran use internet security tools to work around the filters. Supporters outside Iran are developing software to

allow Iranian users to effectively mask the websites they are viewing from the government.   In China, with over 360 million internet users, the problem for the government is much larger. The Chinese government has a firm control on the internet and sometimes blocks social media sites, Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, and Flikr, as a punitive measure, and blocks other sites considered vulgar or inappropriate.[23] Even with the Chinese "Great Firewall" in place, determined Chinese bloggers, entrepreneurs and activists manage to work through and around the government controls to get access to send and receive information.

With more and more societies depending on internet access and mobile technology for commerce, education, medical services, news, and daily life, there is increasingly more pressure for societies to keep access open. This fact creates a great dilemma for closed societies who have a need to control the flow of information in order to maintain the level of control to which they are accustomed. In China, following the Uyghur protests in Xinjiang province in July 2009, the Chinese government shut down internet access to that area of the country for months in an effort to stop the spread of the protests. The economic impact of the shut-down of the internet in the region was significant for Xinjiang Province. Much of the remote region had come to rely on the internet for their business. Business people called for the government to restore the internet connections, but with little relief. [24]   Finally in December 2009 the government re-established limited internet connections, but only to two approved sites. In a statement the Xinjiang government said the restrictions played an important role in stabilizing the situation. But they also "brought some inconvenience to normal life and production," it acknowledged.[25] Increasingly as even closed societies become

dependent on the internet for business and normal daily life, they will be under pressure to allow free access even when the nation feels the need to restrict internet use for security reasons.

Given the increases in speed and transparency of information enabled by social media, why will it matter for military operating in an AOR? In the Global Strategic Assessment produced by the Institute for National Strategic Studies, the author notes that "U.S. Forces in Vietnam could enter and leave a village before anyone outside the area was aware of their presence. Given today's ubiquitous and instantaneous nature of communications systems, such opacity has disappeared. In fact, it is unclear if anything on a future urban battlefield can be kept secret for longer than it takes to establish a cell phone connection." [26] Clearly commanders and planners need to understand the nature of the social media environment in their Areas of Operation (AOR). As remote AORs in the developing world begin to enjoy the benefits of mobile technology and social media, the nature of some AORs will change. Even in places like Afghanistan, where technology has been slow in coming, mobile technology and 3G networks are beginning to become more commonplace. One report says at the end of the 2nd quarter of 2009, there were 10 million cell phone customers in Afghanistan or coverage of 27.8 percent of the population, with an annual growth rate of 72 percent[27] Prior to the fall of the Taliban government, there were virtually no cell phones in the entire country. The citizens in many developing nations now are increasingly dependent on their web connections for daily life.

Commanders and planners operating in this type of environment will need to account for this fact. In a social media environment, the principle of maintaining a

"presence" in the AOR may include not only a physical presence, but also an electronic presence. A commander's Intelligence Preparation of the Battlefield (IPB) and Mission Analysis will have to account for the increased speed and transparency of information flow in the AOR, and must reflect an understanding of the impact. Public Affairs Officers (PAOs), in particular will need to develop tactical agility to stay ahead of the increasingly quick flow of information coming from the theater to the world, since, as the next section will demonstrate, the roles of media in the world are changing.

Changing role of the traditional media and the new media (social media).
The second major phenomenon of the social media revolution is the breakdown of the control the traditional media has on determining which events would make news and which would not. "Our social tools remove older obstacles to public expression, and thus remove the bottlenecks that characterize the mass media. The result is the mass amateurization of efforts previously reserved for the media professionals." [28] Some writers like to say that there is no longer a gate-keeper in the world of public information. [29] The social media tools have allowed almost anyone with a computer or cell phone to post their content on to a medium that can have millions of viewers. Routinely videos on YouTube are viewed millions of times. Many of the videos are taken by ordinary people with very basic equipment and skills. There are countless examples of blogs where users can express their opinions. Twitter allows anyone with an account to post unlimited short comments, pictures and links and gives them the ability to sort and categorize them for easy search.

As described previously in the examples of the Chinese and Haitian earthquakes, and during the Moldovan and Iranian protests, almost anyone can act as an on-the-spot

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correspondent, providing live reports from almost anywhere in the world. When the

Iranian opposition leader Mir-Hossein Mousavi was asked "do you have a

representative or a spokesperson outside the country?" His reply illustrates the power

of the social media to give almost anyone the ability to shape the media environment.

He said: "In the green movement, every citizen is a media outlet. But the green path

does not have a representative or spokesperson outside the country. This is one of its

beauties. Everyone can talk about their ideas and the movement expands within a

collaborative environment."[30]   The social media applications provide amateur journalists

with the forum through which to share their reports. The social media allows almost

anyone, anywhere in the world to put their information out for millions to see.

Perhaps, more significant than being able to simply post content on the web is

the ability to set agendas and shape public opinion. The traditional media now has

competition in its role of agenda-setting. Prior to social media, readers were obliged to

consume the news and events as it was presented to them by the traditional media.

There was very little ability to promote to a broad audience the virtues or vices of an

issue unless it was on the radar screen of the professional media. Social media is

changing that. Following the disputed Iranian elections in June 2009 discussed earlier

in this paper, millions of people began following the protests on the social media,

particularly Twitter. Social media users began to notice what they perceived to be a

lack of coverage of the Friday protests by the major news outlets, particularly CNN. The

Twitter users created a hashtag of #CNN Fail to establish an online group to collect the

tens of thousands of complaints about the perceived lack of coverage.   The Twitter

discussions created quite a stir at CNN even prompting the network to publicly defend

its coverage. By Saturday, the network had posted videos of the protests on CNN.com and by Sunday coverage of the event was plentiful.[31] This is one example where the traditional media was placing a particular level of emphasis on the story as they saw fit based on their understanding of what should make the headlines. Many people in the social media world believed that level of coverage was improper and therefore took action to correct the situation. In this case, the network seemed at a minimum to pay attention to the blogosphere and they may have adjusted their coverage accordingly.

Another example where a vocal online group may have had an impact on setting the media agenda was in the conflict in Darfur.   Advocates argue that awareness of the conflict in Darfur was maintained in large part due to massive social media coverage. Despite the fact that the conflict in Darfur caused over 200,000 deaths and two million people were displaced, to many activists the major media in the world seemed more preoccupied with the events in Iraq, Afghanistan, and major natural disasters like Hurricane Katrina and the 2004 Indian Ocean tsunami. A coalition of over 170 faith-based, advocacy, and humanitarian groups used social media to assist in applying pressure to policymakers worldwide. YouTube held over 6,000 videos on the Darfur conflict, many of which were public service announcements appealing for aid and awareness. Advocates argue that without the use of social media the conflict in Darfur would have received no more attention than similar earlier crises.

Some argue the reason for the increasing influence of the online community in setting agendas is the perceived decrease in credibility of the traditional media. Drapeu and Wells in their National Defense University (NDU) study note that the people participating in online discussions have less trust in mainstream media and traditional

advertising, and more trust in word-of-mouth conversations within their social networks.[32] In China, many of the "netizens" (a slang term for the citizens on the internet)[33] are beginning to question the reports in the Chinese media and are using social media to challenge the accuracy of media reports and to post accounts of events. The Chinese government is losing the ability to shape the media coming out of China, a challenge far more serious than censoring inbound information.[34]

Messages received through social media sources seem to have a very high degree of credibility with the social media users. Using the example of the events in Moldova, why would ten thousand people show up for a protest when they get a Twitter message or read about the planned protests in a blog? Why do people seem to immediately believe the validity of a YouTube video or photographs on Flickr? It raises an interesting question. Does social media have an intrinsic credibility the traditional media no longer has?   The answer may lie with the nature of social media itself. People tend to associate usually with people they know and trust. It may be reasonable then that they establish online relationships with people with whom they have common interests and values as well. When someone with whom one has an online relationship posts information, people tend to be predisposed to believe it. Mr. Moscovici, one of the key Twitter users during the Moldova protests said: "when you follow somebody, you obviously know this person, so you trust this person – it is coming from a real person, not an institution" He goes on to say that Twitter is "trust by association"[35]   That intrinsic credibility allows social media to have great power to sway opinions and create tactical as well as strategic communication challenges for the established institutions.

There is obviously great potential for abuse of trust in social media. Without controls on the information placed on the social media, individuals or groups with nefarious intentions can easily use social media deceptively. In Pakistan there have been several examples of alleged deceptive videos posted on YouTube designed to discredit the opposing side. One video depicted Pakistani soldiers in uniform beating a Taliban member during interrogation. The other was a video depicting a Taliban member administering a brutal lashing to a young girl in the Swat Valley for supposed violations of the Sharia law. In both cases, the authenticity of the videos was debated back and forth by the online community. Viewers either believed or didn't believe message depending on their point of view. This example demonstrates two points; first there is a tremendous potential for false information to be posted on the social media, and second, that people will tend to believe what they are inclined to believe anyway. In either case, the potential that people will use the social media tools for deceptive purposes is an unfortunate reality.

If there is in fact a changing role of the traditional media and the new media, or social media, the obvious question for those involved in military operations is: So what? How will changing roles in the media potentially impact military operations? First, those in the military must understand that Strategic Communication (SC) and Information Operations (IO) are going to be operating in a much faster and more transparent environment. The traditional media will likely be reporting on events well after they have already been reported on the web. It is quite possible that YouTube will contain video of battles before the units involved get back to their bases. When events occur on the battlefield, US Military efforts to shape or contextualize the events will be competing

with those citizens in the society who may have already reported on the events through their use of social media. Local citizens' accounts of events, which will certainly be reported from the local perspective, will likely reach a broad audience before those of any traditional media. The traditional methods used for public affairs and information operations may no longer be as effective. Second, commanders and operators must understand that the reports received through the traditional media may not be considered credible by the audience. Both the audience in the AORs in which we are operating and the audience around the world and back home may assign more credibility to on-the-spot reports and videos that that of the traditional media. That may be particularly true if the traditional media outlets are perceived to be biased. Third, commanders need to be aware that actors with hostile motives will use social media to discredit our operations. Falsified videos on YouTube, and modified photos posted on Flickr and inaccurate reports on other websites may be used to undermine the efforts of the military and that of friendly governments. The potential impacts of the new media capabilities are not all negative. There will be opportunities to use this new phenomenon for positive purposes. Proactive information operators and public affairs specialists have the opportunity to engage in the social media and use its capabilities to help achieve their aims. Commanders and operators need to be aware of the changes to the information environment and account for that in their planning. At a minimum they need to be aware of the new environment and devise a strategy at every level to take advantage of the opportunities it affords, and take measures to mitigate the negative aspects.

The ability to organize without organizations (Social Mobilization). Perhaps the most profound capability afforded by social media is the enhanced capability to rapidly mobilize and organize people in support of a cause. The networking effect of the social media essentially reduces the need for hierarchical and expensive organizations. In its section on *New Threats and New Responses*, the 2009 Global Strategic Assessment written by the Institute for National Strategic Studies, the author notes the following: "Emerging social and peer networking technology…underpin the decentralized networks as distinct organizational forms that have advantages over the traditional hierarchies in terms of flexibility, adaptability, and responsiveness."[36] The author goes on to note that the difference is, while the internet originally enabled "asynchronous mediated communication among edge elements", (one to many), the new social networking capabilities allow "synchronicity of effort without control or formal organizational structure" (many to many). [37] The protests in Moldova and Iran provide two examples to demonstrate this capability. In both cases interested individuals coalesced into groups very quickly with a minimal of leadership and with almost no formal organizational structure for a common purpose. Electronic networks are enabling novel forms of collective action, enabling the creation of collaborative groups that are larger and more distributed than at any other time in history. The scope of work that can be done by non-institutional groups is a profound challenge to the status quo.[38] This means that individuals who formerly found it difficult to collaborate with like-minded, but dispersed groups can now do so with relative ease. It is much easier to mobilize people for collective planning and action without the risks and costs associated with forming an organization. Geographically dispersed individuals using social media

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tools can almost instantly find each other and coalesce into a group for a cause. This new capability may pose a threat to the established institutions, like governments, militaries and large formal organizations which have traditionally held a virtual monopoly on accomplishing tasks requiring large numbers of people to act in a coordinated fashion.

Using the "many to many" communications of social media, groups can operate very effectively with little or no leadership. The formulation of *Wikipedia*, the online collaborative encyclopedia provides an example. *Wikipedia* is able to pull together thousands of volunteer authors from around the world to contribute articles, edit and correct articles, and ensure the accuracy of the entries with only minimal oversight. There are over 14 million articles currently on *Wikipedia* and studies have shown the accuracy to be comparable to that of the Encyclopedia Britannica. [39] [40] Wikipedia is an example of seemingly unrelated people using the wiki technology that allows users to edit online content and using their specific areas of expertise, make a contribution. Users spontaneously divide the efforts and contribute where they best can. There are users who write articles on specific subjects, and different users that review and correct those articles. Some contribute a large amount but most will only ever make a few entries. Somehow the process works very well. There is quite a bit of skepticism about *Wikipedia*. Many say the entries are vulnerable to inaccuracy due to contributors' political and ideological biases, as well as outright cyber-vandalism. The reality is, however, that inaccuracies seem to be very quickly corrected by other users who are dedicated to ensure accurate and unbiased content. The only explanation for this phenomenon is that the people who contribute to *Wikipedia* are dedicated to making

sure the product is good. The people who are volunteering their time and effort are devoted to their work and for a variety of personal motivations. The end result is a fairly well-written encyclopedia, with articles on millions of topics, that is generally accurate, and is produced and updated very quickly.[41] The *Wikipedia* phenomenon demonstrates the capability social media has to enable groups to organize in a very effective manner. That same concept has application in the world of political discourse.

There are several recent examples of social media being used to organize populations for the purpose of promoting social change. We have already discussed the example in Moldova in April 2009 when angry citizens used Twitter and other blogs to assist in gathering ten thousand protestors to demonstrate against the government after the elections they believed to be flawed. We have also already discussed the case where citizens in Iran used social media to aid in mobilizing support for protests following the elections in June 2009 and in subsequent protests. In a radio interview, done by the BBC, a prominent member of the Iranian Diaspora, Hamid Dabashi, a contributor to *The Week in Green*, a weekly broadcast/podcast to Iranian opposition members both inside and outside Iran, said "(the social media) was crucial in getting protestors in to the streets for protests...there is no leadership….the networking is the leadership"[42]

There are still more examples of social media being used to organize for political purposes. The Uyghur uprising in the summer of 2009 in Xinjiang Province of China where social media played a role in organizing, received large amounts of media attention due to its violent nature, but most examples are more low-key and local. In Indonesia for example, citizens united on Facebook, Twitter and blogs to counter

terrorism in their country. Following the July 17, 2009 terrorist attacks in Jakarta,

citizens formed an online group called IndonesiaUnite to unite citizens for the purpose

of creating a uniting symbol against the terrorist elements in their country. Within two

weeks, they had over 200,000 fans on their Facebook page. The effort quickly spread

to offline activities, like music and television shows. The effort was successful in

bringing wide spread attention to the popular dislike for the terrorists in their country.[43]

In the Middle East, Syrian and other Arab activists are initiating Twitter campaigns to

support their cause against the perceived injustices against the Palestinians in Gaza.

They give online instructions to supporters on where to go to find information and how

to make their posts more effective.[44] In the Russian enclave of Kaliningrad in

December 2009, over 10,000 protestors turned out to protest against the policies of the

governing party, *One Russia*. The Russian authorities were surprised to see the

strength of the protests and dispatched a delegation to investigate the causes of the

discontent. According to BBC report, the organizers of the protests used a combination

of social media tools to organize and spread the word about the protests in the region.

They used YouTube, Vkontakte (a Russian Language social networking site) blogs, and

a local website to successfully achieve their aims.[45]

     The degree to which these online organizers will achieve success is hard to

quantify. Some of them are trying to achieve major societal change through collective

action, but most are simply trying to increase awareness for their cause. The ultimate

impact of these efforts will take time to discern. The important point, however, is that

social media is becoming a common platform for activists to use to organize and plan

collective action with the aim to result in some level of social change. Movements

advocating social justice and freedom seem to be plentiful on the internet, but groups with more militant aims are equally able to use the social media for their purposes.

Terrorist organizations like Al Qaeda have for years been effectively using the internet to spread their propaganda to a broad audience.   Much like the rest of the online world, the terrorist organizations are now turning their attention to the social media to suit their purposes. They are using the tools to organize and direct activities. For example, Al Qaeda has established a "special media" department called "As-Sahab" the Global Islamic Media Front as the focal point for their social media and outreach program. They have found that people are more easily radicalized through these more informal tools like chat rooms and blogs. They are increasingly using social media tools like Twitter, Facebook and YouTube because the younger generation of potential jihadis are more comfortable using these media.[4647] Jihadi organizations use links to videos showing everything from sermons by radical clerics to videos on how to make a bomb. A prominent Al Qaeda website recently announced a new project call the "Al Ansar Mobile Team" whose aim is to spread extremist ideology and recruit supporters for their cause in the Arab world using mobile phone technology. In an attempt to circumvent the internet security crackdowns, they upload audio of music, sermons and lectures promoting terrorist ideals and send them out using the web-enabled mobile technology. The use of anonymous phones and prepaid phone cards helps the organizations avoid any detection by government and intelligence collecting agencies.[48]

The terrorist groups are using the social media to expand their efforts around the world in areas where they have had difficulty in spreading their message. In Africa, Al Qaeda in the Lands of the Islamic Magreb (AQLIM) has become quite effective at using

the social media to unite their supporters. They have Twitter accounts and Facebook

pages that are sufficiently masked to avoid attracting attention. They take advantages

of the many languages supported by these social media tools to communicate with

brothers in different regions of the continent. On these and other websites, they discuss

their intentions and demonstrate a very adept knowledge of the workings of the newest

tools available using mobile technology and social media. The social media tools have

also been used to recruit and organize potential supporters around the world, including

in the United States. Recently five Americans of Pakistani, Ethiopian and Egyptian

decent were arrested in Pakistan while attempting to join up with extremist groups. The

men who were living in the United States were said to be using Facebook and YouTube

to connect with the groups in Pakistan.[49]

How will the enhanced ability to organize and mobilize supporters without the

need for formal organizations affect military operations? Why should the US military

care? Again, as with the other capabilities provided through the use of the social media,

this provides both the US and its potential adversaries with enhanced capabilities to

mobilize support. Mao Tse-tung recognized the importance in revolutionary warfare, of

the mobilization of the population. In his writings on Protracted War, he said:

This move is crucial; it is indeed of primary importance, while our inferiority in

weapons and other things is only secondary. The mobilization of the common people

throughout the country will create a vast sea in which to drown the enemy, create the

conditions that will make up for our inferiority in arms and other things, and create the

prerequisites for overcoming every difficulty in the war… how should we mobilize them?

By word of mouth, by leaflets and bulletins, by newspapers, books and pamphlets,

through plays and films, through schools, through the mass organizations and through our cadres.[50]

By mobilizing the Chinese peasantry, Mao was able to eventually create the vast sea in which to drown his enemy. What Mao was able to achieve over a period of decades, through a very slow and painstaking effort to spread his message and mobilize support using the tools of the middle 20th century, today with the use of social media might be done in months, weeks, or even days.

When conducting operations in the social media age, commanders and operators need to understand that the potential exists for a very rapid mobilization of support. They also need to understand that attacking the leadership of a social media-driven revolution, might not be possible. With ubiquitous communications tools and widely dispersed coordination and collaboration of our adversaries' actions, the only way to effectively combat a passionately-driven revolution might require us to engage in the social media battlefield as well. The need for commanders to understand the nature of the organizational abilities enabled by social media and to develop an effective strategy for that may be crucial to success.

Section 3. How do we commanders develop strategy to be successful in a social media environment?

There are many perspectives from which to consider social media. The following section will view social media in a way that will aid a commander in better understanding the environment of the battlefield and how the societies and cultures involved will impact the military operations in the AOR. There is a considerable discussion among those in the military concerning the impact of what Wells and Drapeu in their NDU study refer to as the inward sharing of information using social media.

Inward sharing can be described as sharing information within the organization.[51]   The discussion of inward sharing invokes detailed and complicated issues involving internal policies and procedures as well as bandwidth and operational security (OPSEC) issues. While important, this paper will not address those issues as they are beyond the scope of this research.

So far this paper has discussed many of the aspects of social media and provided numerous examples. It has described social media and its potential impact on the political discourse in society. It has discussed three broad impacts of social media, the increased speed and transparency of information, the changing roles of the traditional media and the new media, and finally, the increased ability to mobilize support using the organizational aspects of social media tools. It has also briefly touched on why those aspects may be important to the nature of conflicts. The one key question remaining is: What strategy should commanders adopt to be successful operating in a social media environment?

First, why is it important to have a strategy for social media? Can an effective social media strategy have an impact on the outcomes of military operations? In a recent *Military Review* article, the authors described the use of new media tools in the *Second Lebanon War* involving the Israeli forces, and Hezbollah in the summer of 2006, and then contrasted that with *Operation Cast Lead*, when the Israeli forces attacked into the Gaza strip in December 2008 and January 2009.   The effectiveness of Hezbollah's new media strategy in the 2006 war with Israel and then the improvements made by the Israeli forces during the 2008-2009 operation, highlight how strategic outcomes can be affected by the development of an effective new media strategy.[52]

In 2006, during the Second Lebanon War, Hezbollah effectively integrated information operations, including social media, into their tactical operations to fight the Israelis. Hezbollah embedded photos and videos into blogs and YouTube to promote their image and to highlight negative perceptions of Israeli operations. Hezbollah used information very effectively to limit Israel's strategic options. After 33 days of fighting, a cease fire was declared and Hezbollah claimed victory. Hezbollah was able to create a "perception of failure" for the Israeli forces. During the 2006 war, Israel ignored the realities of the new media and relied instead on traditional information policies. They were less agile than Hezbolla and were unable to match them in the information war. In contrast, by 2008-09 in Operation Cast Lead, the Israeli forces devised a more effective strategy for the use of new media. The Israelis developed a proactive information strategy, incorporating social media tools, YouTube and Twitter, along with enlisting the support of the Israeli online communities, the Israeli forces were better able to set the agendas in the media and control the perceptions of the fighting. The result was the Israelis used information effectively to preserve strategic options enabling them to achieve their objectives.[53]

A Strategy

The following are recommendations commanders operating in an AOR may adopt to take advantage of the benefits made possible by the use of social media. The specific circumstances will certainly affect how commanders should approach the challenge. In some AORs, where the population is accustomed to online activity and where the communications infrastructure is mature, the benefits of a social media strategy may pay great benefits. In others the payoff may be less. In any circumstance,

a thorough analysis of the online activity in the AOR, followed-up with the development of an appropriate strategy will pay benefits to the commander. As social media becomes more ubiquitous, almost any AOR in which US forces will operate will be impacted to some degree by the use of social media.

The strategic framework used by the U.S. Army War College defines a strategy as the relationship between ends, ways, and means. In order to develop a strategy, you must first have objectives or "ends" in mind. The "ends" are the objectives or the goals sought by the commander devising the strategy.[54] With respect to social media what are some of the ends a commander might have in mind?

The Ends

Perhaps the first end commanders should have in mind when determining their strategy for social media is to develop a better understanding of the environment, or better situational awareness through an effective use of social media. By systematically observing the online community in the area of responsibility (AOR), commanders may be able to develop an ongoing understanding of the society, their concerns and interests, and they may be able to identify emerging trends and patterns. Blogs and social networking sites may be able to provide insight to any society where there is a significant online community, particularly in societies with a relatively young population. The Department of State (DOS) has effectively used social networking sites to gauge the sentiments within societies. The US embassies in many nations are effectively using Facebook and other social media tools in places like Podgorica, Damascus, Phnom Penh, and Panama to maintain relationships with the local cultures, particularly with the youth who are more likely to engage using social media.[55]

Maintaining a social media presence in deployed locations will also allow commanders to better understand potential threats and emerging trends within their AORs.   The online community can in many ways provide a good indicator of the prevailing mood and emerging issues within a society. Many of the vocal opposition groups will likely use social media to air grievances publicly. In *Military Review* in the fall of 2008, General David Petraeus wrote an article entitled Multi-National Force –Iraq Commander's Counterinsurgency Guidance. In the article, he lists key tasks for his commanders in Iraq. While the tasks listed in the article are intended for fighting the insurgency in Iraq, many of them are universally applicable. For example, he says it is important for commanders to "Understand the neighborhood", and "Live among the people".[56] An online social media presence can be an integral part of understanding the issues and attitudes in a neighborhood or community.   An online presence can play a significant role in "living among the people" in a society that has a significant online community. Social media will certainly not be the only tool used by commanders, however it may enable the commander to better understand his environment and allow him to have better situational awareness of his environment.

A second desired "end" for social media in a theater of operations may be: To assist the command in providing better, more agile, and credible public information in the AOR (both Strategic Communication and local/tactical information). As demonstrated in the example above of the Israeli defense forces, aggressive engagement in the social media environment can aid a commander in winning the information fight. General Petreus' guidance emphasizes the importance of several related tasks. He says in his guidance to "fight the information war relentlessly" and to

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"be first with the truth".[57]   Clearly a social media program can play a key role in accomplishing these tasks. Understanding that social media has altered the way news is reported and the speed with which it is reported, commanders will be best served if they are actively engaged in the environment. With an aggressive online presence, commanders can be better prepared to counter false and negative reporting as events occur. They can better interdict and react to bad news if they are already engaged and understand the way reporting in the AOR is likely to proceed as events occur. Finally, by being proactive, commanders can avoid letting the enemy elements set the agenda, by being first with the truth. As demonstrated in Operation Cast Lead in Gaza, commanders can use social media to help set the agenda in a strategically beneficial way.

The third and final "end" for commanders using social media in an AOR is enhanced unity of effort. General Petraeus in his guidance says that commanders should strive for unity of effort with the embassy, the interagency partners, local governmental leaders and Non-governmental organizations (NGOs) to make sure all are working to achieve a common purpose.[58] The characteristics discussed earlier relating to the ability of social media to aid in organizing can be used to enhance unity of effort with partner organizations in the theater of operations.   The Israeli Defense Forces used new media methods to enlist the support of the Israeli "blogosphere" to help achieve a common purpose during Operation Cast Lead. A proactive and innovative social media strategy, using social networking, blogs, and Twitter-like capabilities can aid commanders in ensuring all concerned entities in the theater of operations are sharing the necessary information to work towards a common goal.

The Ways

The second element in developing a strategy is to identify the "ways" or how one organizes and applies the resources.[59] What are the organizational schemes and methods required to achieve the "ends" the commander has stated?

The first of the "ways" to enable social media to achieve the commander's desired ends is the concept that the social media use must be in the form of a Commander's Social Media Program. That is to say, the social media should have the support and interest of the commander and key members of his staff, and should be formalized into a program with responsibilities assigned to members of the commander's staff. The commander should view social media as an asset rather than a threat. Social media planning should be incorporated across the spectrum of conflict. The commander should state his intent for information effects explicitly noting the role social media will play. That will allow his staff to generate options much the same way as for other combat multipliers. A proactive engagement with social media incorporated into the commander's operational planning will likely provide the best results.

There will certainly be skeptics about the need for a command social media program. In an article linked to the Department of State's Social Media Hub, entitled *Eight Ways to Ruin your Social Media Strategy*, Mistake number one is: "Pretend you can do without it".[60] As seen in the case of the Israeli Defense Forces' experience, ignoring new media is done at your own peril.

A second "way" to take advantage of social media is to organize the social media program for success. The US military has experimented with ways of organizing for success in Strategic Communication (SC) for the last few years. The experience gained

in organizing for SC may provide some insight to organizing for social media success as well. The Joint Warfighting Center's *Commander's Handbook for Strategic Communication* lays out five models that have been used for organizing SC.

The options include:

1. Increased Command Emphasis (Least Costly)

2. Tasking an Existing Staff Leader

3. Direct Planning Team Integration

4. Centralized Control of all Strategic Communication-Related Activities under a Separate Directorate (Most Costly)

5. Strategic Communication Director with a small coordinating staff and supporting Strategic Communication Working Group.

The final option has gained the most traction in the field, with several Combatant Commands (COCOMs) adopting a similar structure.[61] That option provides the commander the ability to incorporate the best attributes of the other options and maintain an appropriate level of command emphasis on the SC program. While commanders may choose to employ a similar methodology for social media, integration of social media planning into an already existing SC structure may also be an effective way to ensure success. There may be synergy created by integrating the social media program into the SC program. Commanders will have to evaluate the costs with the potential benefits in their particular situation.

The natural reaction of many commanders may be to assign one staff section as the proponent for the social media, (option 2 above) leaving the responsibility for integration to them. While that approach may be easier to implement than some of the

other options, the risk is the social media program will become viewed as a niche program and will not get the attention it might deserve. Further, the social media program would assume the natural biases of the assigned staff element, decreasing its broad effectiveness. For example, if the J6 (Command, Control, Communications, & Computer Systems staff section) were the proponent, they might input a technical bias, and likewise the Public Affairs (PA) section might tend to approach social media as a media outreach tool only. Thus broad integration may provide the best opportunity to achieve the results desired.

The third "way" to benefit from social media is the creation of a Social Media Monitoring Team. This team is to be the eyes and ears of the strategy team. They may be viewed as "Social Media Scouts", observing, monitoring and collecting information on the state of the online community in the AOR. The monitoring team represents a systematic way to take advantage of the content and trends ongoing in the social media. Without a systematic approach, there may be little chance of making accurate observations and drawing the correct conclusions from the online traffic in the AOR. If every staff section were to independently monitor Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, or the local language versions of social networks and blogs, without lateral coordination within the staff, there will likely be significant gaps in the monitoring of the social media environment.

The monitoring team should contain broad staff representation in order to be effective. The team will require members with local language skills, cultural understanding and a high degree of familiarity with the social media tools and protocols. In order to be effective they will need to conduct field research in the AOR. They will

need to observe the internet cafes and local habits in the AOR and become familiar with the social media platforms popular in the culture. The team will become the experts in the command on the social media activity within the AOR.

The fourth "way" to ensure success in a social media strategy is to find a balance between security and sharing. The information security concerns over experimentation of social software on DoD computers are not trivial. Security officers will be inclined to say no to extensive use of social media on networks that are used for official purposes.[62] There is considerable discussion within the DoD on this issue. The services have significant disagreement on the right level of access to allow, balanced against the need for security. The DoD policy released on February 25, 2010 directs that "all NIPRNET (unclassified networks) shall be configured to provide access to internet-based capabilities across all DoD Components."[63] The policy goes on, however, to give the components significant latitude to take actions to limit access to defend against malicious activity when needed. There may be ways using firewalls or separated networks to ensure security of information while still benefiting from the use of social media. Each command will have to weigh this balance and make the decision based on their needs.

Since speed and agility are key elements of successful social media strategy, the fifth "way" to enhance success in a strategy is to enact policies to allow the social media campaign to be agile. Restrictive and cumbersome approval chains may inhibit the ability of the operators to achieve results. Perhaps the best approach is to allow for centralized planning and decentralized execution.[64] The enemy will not be constrained by cumbersome approval process for posting information to the internet, and has the

ability to act very quickly. Operation Valhalla in Iraq in 2006 provides an illustrative

example.

During a successful firefight against the Jaish al Mahdi (JAM) forces, US Special

Forces and Iraqi forces, killed a number of enemy fighters, rescued a hostage, and

destroyed a weapons cache; by all measures, a very successful operation. By the time

the US and Iraqi forces returned to their base, someone repositioned the bodies and

removed the weapons of the JAM fighters so that it looked like they were murdered

while at prayer. They photographed the bodies in these new poses and uploaded the

images onto the internet, along with a press release explaining that American soldiers

killed the men while they were praying in a mosque. All this took the enemy less than an

hour. The public reaction was predictably negative. The US forces had a combat

camera crew with them during the operation, and some of the soldiers wore helmet

cameras. The US forces were in possession of the evidence to disprove the claims, but

a cumbersome and highly centralized process for releasing information prevented the

correct story from reaching the media for nearly three days. By the time the US forces

released the correct version of Operation Valhalla, the strategic damage was done. [65]

The inability to react immediately to the enemy claims in the previous example was

largely for policy reasons. To promote agility the US military's policies must allow for

decentralized execution of operations involving new media.

Decentralization of execution will, however, force commanders to accept levels of

risk with which they may not be comfortable. The commander will essentially delegate

the control of information releasing authority to uncomfortably low levels. Clear rules of

engagement (ROE) distributed to all the potential social media operators may be able to

mitigate the risks. The need for agility will often conflict with the need to carefully control the strategic message.[66]

One of the key elements for commanders to enhance agility in their social media program is to allow and encourage social media operations to be executed even at the lowest unit level. Many of the closest relationships established in an AOR are done so at battalion level and below. The local government leaders, the tribal leaders, the local police and militias are all developing relationships at the very lowest levels. The leaders at these units will know how best to interface with the local population. Local websites and blogs, and links to the Facebook pages can be used for local activities. In Africa, there are examples of local groups reporting tactical information like roadblocks and ambushes to websites set up by DOS teams. The website then consolidates them on to a map for locals to check when they are travelling.[67] Commanders may be able to enhance local relationships with the positive use of social media at the unit level.

The sixth and final "way" in which a commander can take advantage of social media is to set up social networking sites as an outreach tool to enhance unity of effort. As General Petreus mentioned in his guidance, there are a number of key partners in theater with whom units must cooperate. Seemingly simple efforts like establishing a Facebook page can allow partner organizations better understand the commander's intent. Joint Task Force (JTF) Haiti, supporting relief operations in the aftermath of the January 2010 earthquake has effectively used social media as a tool for outreach to other organizations engaged in the effort.

There are numerous key relationships in the AOR relative to the social media strategy. The obvious ones are the local governments, the NGOs operating in the area,

the local press, local civic organizations, and the local populace in general. Commanders should also consider outreach to the local blogger community (if there is one), local businesses, the internet service provider (ISP), and the cellular network providers. These relationships will better enable the social media program to be effective and adaptable to changes.

The Means

The final component in the development of a strategy is the identification of the "means". The means are the resources available to pursue the objectives. Fortunately in the US military today the means to conduct an effective social media strategy are readily available. The skills and resources already contained in the US armed forces today are the ones needed to be successful in the social media environment. To employ the strategy listed above, there may be a requirement to reorganize and re-prioritize resources within deployed headquarters as described in the discussion of the "ways", but there will be no wholly new skills or equipment required.

Some of the key "means" or resources required will be the individual talents and skills of our service members. Skilled information operators, public affairs specialists, and intelligence collectors and analysts are already conducting operations at all levels and in all services of the DoD. Language and cultural skills will continue to be a critical factor in our ability to conduct operations around the world. When engaging with social media, operators who are trained to function effectively in the cultures in which we are operating will be key assets. The "digital natives" will be critical to success in the social media environment as well. In a report following the *New Media and the Warfighter* workshop, the authors define digital natives as "those young service members who are

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savvy in the use of new media devices, platforms, networks, and possibilities – and are underexploited assets in the information-led wars against new adversaries."[68] Employing these younger and more tech savvy operators in roles that will have strategic impact will require some change to the traditional hierarchical mindset. The bright and talented personnel will continue to be the foundation for success.

These digital natives however, may lack the strategic insight and understanding of more senior strategists and planners. Strategic-thinkers will have to provide clear guidance and oversight to ensure the actions of the digital natives match the strategic intent of the commander. In order for the relationship between the leaders and the operators to work, the senior leaders must have an understanding of the capabilities and limitations of social media. Social media may be one case where the senior leaders must be trained to have an understanding what the soldiers and junior officers already know. Inclusion of an introduction to social media into commanders' courses may be an appropriate initiative.

Finally, the military's ties with academia and industry will be more important than ever. These relationships have already been established. The DoD has some very effective ties with the blogger community and with many companies who are engaged throughout the social media community. The relationships currently enjoyed by the DoD today will have to continue to grow in order to ensure the success of any social media strategy.

Section 4. Conclusion

> *We must hold our minds alert and receptive to the application of unglimpsed methods and weapons. The next war will be won in the future, not the past. We must go on, or we will go under.*
> *General of the Army Douglas MacArthur, 1931*

In 1931, General MacArthur could not have imagined many of the forms of warfare that would be used just a few years later during World War II. He understood, however that changes in methods and weapons can alter the nature of conflict. Just as machine guns, tanks and aircraft changed the nature of conflicts, so did, the telegraph, radio, television, and eventually the internet. The advances today in the information world, specifically with the advent of social media, or new media may prove to be as profound as any of these inventions. We must therefore observe and adjust our information strategies in order to not "go under".

The social media is a phenomenon that has certainly changed the way information is passed across societies and around the world.   The rapid spread of blogs, social networking sites, media sharing technology and wikis, aided by the rapid spread of mobile technology, has changed the conditions in which we conduct military operations. The speed and transparency of information has increased dramatically. Events that only a few years ago could remain state secrets indefinitely are being reported around the world in minutes. The traditional roles of the media have changed with the ubiquitous nature of data transmitting technology. Simple cell phone cameras can transmit damning images to the world, unfiltered in the time it takes to make a phone call. People can use social networking to mobilize groups in support of a cause without having to expose themselves to the risks and costs formerly associated with activism. And in response, governments and institutions can do little to effectively stop it.

Fighting the advances of information technology would be futile, and pointless. The only effective way to address the changes afforded by social media is to harness

the technology for our own purposes. The development of strategies that recognize the

shifts and take advantage of them is the prudent course of action. There are already

examples of militaries who have tried to ignore the realities of the new media and they

have suffered. Social media has the capability to help us better understand the

environment in which we operate. It can allow us to provide better and more agile

strategic information in support of our operations. Finally, it can be harnessed to help

us achieve unity of effort with our partners in conflict. Finding clever and innovative

ways to achieve the desired ends, using the resources available is the best way to be

successful in conducting operations in a social media environment that is sure to

continue to evolve.

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